



DAILY INTERLAKE

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EPA head to visit Libby**The Daily Inter Lake**

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Mike Leavitt will visit Libby on May 26, making good on his promise last year to U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont.

Baucus has been critical of the EPA's pace in cleaning up the town's extensive asbestos contamination from a defunct vermiculite mine. He hopes Leavitt's visit will spur the agency's efforts.

Baucus said that the agency has identified more than 1,300 properties in Libby that still require cleanup after three years and that the EPA's time frame for cleaning up the town has been pushed back from 2004 to 2008.

Baucus supported Leavitt's nomination to head the EPA last year after the former Utah

governor promised he would visit Libby personally and help the town recover. W.R. Grace & Co. operated the mine from 1963 to 1990.

During a recent Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing, Baucus took Leavitt to task for not being more vocal about the agency's below-par funding levels.

Baucus said President Bush's fiscal year 2005 budget request to Congress includes \$7.8 billion for the EPA, a 7.2 percent cut from 2004 funding levels.

"It will be so important for him to see personally, with his own eyes, the devastation asbestos has caused there," Baucus said. "I want Governor Leavitt to see and feel the spirit and courage folks have in Libby. I want him to look into their eyes, like I have, and hear their stories."